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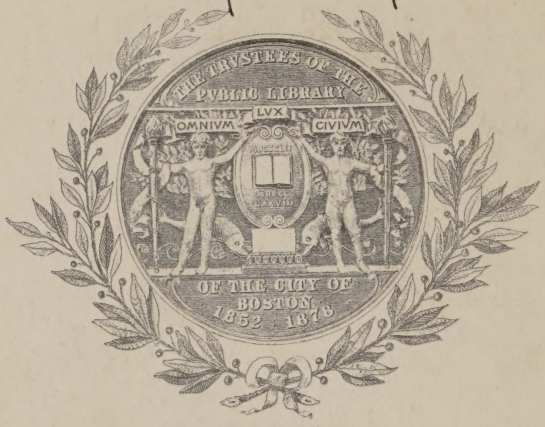

GIVEN BY

Prof. Henry C. Bolton.

Mar. 20, 1896.

Henry Carrington Bolton

FORTUNE-TELLING IN AMERICA TO-DAY.[1]

A STUDY OF ADVERTISEMENTS.

760.37

THAT fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, and astrologers, so-called, should succeed in earning a livelihood in this eminently practical country, and in these enlightened days, is a matter of surprise to those who fail to take into consideration the efforts which all classes of people are now making to penetrate the supernatural. The intelligent and cultivated become students of psychology, hypnotism, and psychical phenomena, while the unlettered and credulous dabble in cheiromancy, clairvoyance, and astrology. Still a third class of persons, who can hardly be called intelligent and who would scornfully repudiate an accusation of ignorance, engage seriously in studying the mysteries of the Kabbala, discourse learnedly on theosophy, and investigate the phenomena of spiritualism.

Notwithstanding the high average of intelligence in these United States, quite a number of fortune-tellers ply their trade with certain success in most of our larger cities; the daily press teems with the advertisements of these charlatans, who style themselves "clairvoyants," "spiritualists," and "test-mediums," but more commonly "astrologers;" and under the latter heading their advertisements are usually grouped by the editors who have in charge the make-up of the papers. These announcements set forth their boasted powers in extravagant terms, and a study of them gives us an insight into the claims and business methods of their authors.

These advertisements used to be far more numerous in the daily papers of our Eastern cities than at present, and their decrease in number probably denotes increase in intelligence; on the other hand, San Francisco newspapers are especially rich in these curiosities of literature, a fact indicating that superstition goes hand-in-hand with the adventurous spirit of the rough characters who first settle in newly-opened lands.

Here, as in Europe, women seem to succeed better than men in the business of fortune-telling, for the advertisements of the "Madames" far outnumber those of the "Professors;" indeed, clairvoyance might be included in the list of occupations open to women. Like their gypsy cousins, they are generally of a migratory disposition, not however conducting their wanderings in a house-wagon, but moving from town to town by railway and steamboat. After engaging for a few weeks a "parlor" in a suitable neighborhood, not too expensively aristocratic and not too deep in the slums,

[1] Read to the Baltimore Branch of the American Folk-Lore Society, December 12, 1895.

they announce their arrival in printer's ink, either through the daily press or by circulars which are distributed broadcast throughout the place; circulars are used chiefly in the smaller villages.

Fortune-tellers are not all migratory, however, for some "Professors" find their business so steadily profitable that they boast of having been many years established at a given address.

The more wealthy and aristocratic of these shrewd speculators in human weakness are not content with two rooms in a lodging-house, but reside in comparative affluence in houses of fair dimensions; the successful also employ assistants, who, acting as doorkeepers and acolytes, add dignity to the establishment, and aid in throwing a veil of awful mystery over the presiding genius of the inner sanctum. These latter-day, well-fed, richly-apparelled, comfortably-housed fortune-tellers present a great contrast to PINCH:—

> A hungry, lean-faced villain,
> A mere anatomy, a mountebank,
> A thread-bare juggler, and a fortune-teller;
> A needy, hollow-eyed, sharp-looking wretch,
> A living dead-man.

The well-to-do fortune-tellers are, however, few in number; the majority earn precarious livelihoods; the times have changed since astrologers secured the patronage of crowned heads; there is no Rudolph II. in the New World to support them at court in idle luxury, nor are there opportunities to repeat the career of the famous Mlle. Lenormant who was so prominent a figure in the days of Napoleon I.

Some of the less pretentious fortune-tellers add to their ordinary business "magnetic healing," promise "wonderful cures," and advertise themselves as "medical clairvoyants;" one woman, with unwonted thrift, offers to act as "a first-class manicure," and to sell a "preparation for speedily restoring lost hair." Bodily presence is by no means essential to success in the treatment of ailments by these medical clairvoyants; one person offers "absent treatments $5 per month, send stamp for diagnosis." Surely this ungrammatical proposal infers the climax of credulity! but has the apparent merit of economy. Some of the advertisers receive "ladies only" in their parlors, and nearly all of them show favoritism to the gentler sex by a lower charge, a common phrase being, "ladies, 50 cts.; gents, $1." The fees demanded run from 25 cents to $2 and upwards, the higher sums being proportioned to the superstitious faith and apparent financial ability of clients, as ascertained during the interviews. For attention to correspondence, the usual charge seems to be $2, which shows that clairvoyants find letter-writing more exhausting than the trance.

To attract the attention of the unlettered, and to mystify them, certain high-sounding expressions are introduced into the printed announcements: one male advertiser claims to be an "astral seer," another a "planet-reader;" the women are "charm-workers," "gifted with second sight;" they act as "palmists," "gypsy life-readers," or "trance mediums." Some offer to give "clairvoyant sittings," "spiritual tests," and to form "developing circles."

A great variety of methods of divination is offered adapted to please all tastes. You can visit an "astrologer," who will "cast horoscopes," or a "card-reader," whose simple, time-honored methods are well known; or you can consult in your emergency a "slate-writer," whose clever sleight-of-hand will puzzle the most observant unbeliever. If, however, you shrink from personal contact with the "medium," it will be quite sufficient to send him (or her) by mail "a sample of your handwriting," or "locks of hair, with stamps," to obtain a revelation of your past life, with a prophecy as to your future, and plenty of advice as to your conduct in love-affairs, all quite as accurate and valuable as if received from the lips of the great clairvoyant herself, and having the enormous advantage of ready reference.

If none of these methods appeal to you, there are Professors who will seek indications of the future with the aid of a "genuine Hindoo talisman," or in "eggs," "crystals," "beryls," and "mirrors." Of this latter phase of mental hallucination I have given some account in "A Modern Oracle and its Prototypes." (Jour. Amer. Folk-Lore, 1893.) Some offer to teach these and other methods of divination; a Chicago woman advertises "mediums properly developed." Besides these glittering attractions, you can secure, for a consideration, "magic charms," "love-tokens," and "talismans," though some of the latter are far too precious to part with, since they endow the possessor with the magical powers necessary to conduct the business.

Advice is offered on the greatest variety of topics, and promises are made of "sure help," "healing troubles," "reuniting lovers," "removing bad habits," "restoring lost love by sympathy," "true pictures of future wives and husbands," and of "lucky numbers" for those who play policy and speculate in lotteries. A Chicago clairvoyant advertises "race tips;" a New Orleans advertiser offers to "locate buried treasures." A most important item is the offer to "give points in law and on all business transactions," thus making expensive lawyers superfluous and assuring financial success. Add to these enticing proposals the fact that the advertisers "guarantee satisfaction," for "mistake [is] impossible" and "nothing [is] excepted" from their vision, and one really has to exert conscientious

self-control to keep away from these fortunate beings of magnificent promises.

To add to the mystery which is supposed to surround the lives of these gifted mortals, they claim to be of Egyptian ancestry, "gypsy queens," "born with cauls," and the "seventh daughter of a seventh daughter," a happy domestic accident supposed to confer miraculous powers upon the younger woman. And to still further excite curiosity and to stimulate superstitious belief, the advertisers adopt fanciful names, often indicative of foreign birth; thus we find the following startling and obviously fictitious combinations: "Madame Exodius," "Yamena, the Turkish Fortune-Teller," "Madame Don," "Carmelos," "Augusta Leola," "Madame Castella," and "Sentinella Guzhdo, the great Egyptian Prophetess," whose captivating circular will be given entire later on. The men seem to scorn this trickery, and generally use commonplace names, sometimes with the prefix "Professor," a greatly abused privilege much practised by charlatans in every walk of life. A Chicago "medium" uses the name "Sir Russell Easton," a bold claim of knighthood.

The business hours of these hard-working people are generally very long: "9 to 9" is a very common statement; but others are more specific, and announce "circles Mondays and Fridays, 8 P. M.," besides "sittings daily 10 to 2," hours which must sadly interfere with sound digestion. One conscientious, or perhaps pleasure-loving man advertises, "Sundays excepted." Mrs. Seal, of San Francisco, offers "test circles on Wednesday evenings and developing circles on Thursday evenings," which indicates that she has well-trained spirits under perfect control.

This partial analysis of the ninety advertisements[1] and circulars I have collected (the number could easily be increased tenfold), prepares the way for the presentation of characteristic specimens. The following from a paper published at Washington, D. C., is a typical one, embracing many common features in a condensed form; it is classed under "Personals:" —

> Prof. Clay, wonderful clairvoyant and medium, tells your life from cradle to grave; every hidden mystery revealed; tells the business that will bring you greatest success; in love affairs he never fails; unites separated; recovers losses; causes speedy marriages; removes evil influences; foretells with a certainty all commercial and business transactions; twelve years established. Ladies and gentlemen, 50 cents each. Hours 9 to 9; open Sunday.

This and all succeeding advertisements are transcribed verbatim, and the names are not altered; the addresses only are omitted as unimportant.

[1] From papers published in New York, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Atlanta.

Briefer, and therefore cheaper, are the five following from a San Francisco journal: —

Great Clairvoyant: Mme. Stewart, from Boston; the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter; has read cards since 11 years of age; life revealed — past, present, future; ladies or gents, 50c.; beautiful parlors.

Gypsy Queen; Planet Reader; life mystery revealed; gives lucky numbers; helps you with the lucky star; she has a natural powerful gift.

Mrs. Ethel Gray, palmist, life reader, magnetic healer. 108 6th, parlors 1–2.

Mme. Porter, Card Reader. Ladies, 50c.; gents, $1; palmistry and clairvoyant sittings, $1.50.

Mme. Lenemar; fortunes told by planet; predicted in 1874 passengers of overdue steamer on island.

In the last advertisement cited indubitable proof is given of the lady's prophetic ability; the same idea has occurred to an astrologer of Kansas City, Mo., who quotes the language of a former client: —

"Had I followed your advice given three years ago, I would have been happy to-day." — S. E. Dobbs, Springtown, Tex. Thousands testify that I correctly read the past and foretell the future; send date of birth and 10 cents for a sketch of your life. L. Thomson, astrologer, Kansas City, Mo.

Claims to supernatural power conferred by talismans are found in the following: —

Augusta Leola, Fortune-Teller; magic charms, love tokens, true picture of future wife and husband; teaches fortune-telling; develops clairvoyance, slate-writing, etc.; has the seven holy seals and the Palestine wonder charm; fee, $1 and upward.

The next is characteristic: —

Mme. Dr. Thomas, Scientific Revealer by eggs and cards; tells entire life, past, present, future; consultations on all affairs, nothing excepted; names given good advice, sure help; restores lost love by sympathy; mistake impossible; fee $1; letter $2.

A New Orleans clairvoyant advertises thus: —

A wish obtained without voudouism; please call on Mme. Genevieve. A wish obtained by mail.

A certain "Professor Walter," of San Francisco, is very lavish in the use of printers' ink, the three principal papers of that city containing on the same date long advertisements, one of which we copy entire: —

Attention! Professor Walter is in the city, at 303 Jones Street. Satisfaction absolutely guaranteed. Health, wealth, and happiness by consulting the professor. He is the greatest clairvoyant of the Nineteenth century. Don't miss the opportunity to consult him, for there may be something in the future which will be beneficial to you. Thousands of people have been made happy by his aid and advice. The professor has been pronounced by all his patrons as

the most powerful clairvoyant and test medium of the age, being successful in all cases where others have often failed. You will find the professor a perfect gentleman and very honest in his business. He will be pleased to see all who have a desire to consult him. The professor possesses powers of marvellous character, unsurpassed by any so-called mediums or future readers. His success in the past proves his superior ability to help you now. Interview him and you will say that he is the greatest wonder of the age. The professor challenges the world as a clairvoyant. He overcomes your enemies, removes family troubles, restores lost affections, causes happy marriage with the one you love, removes all influences, bad habits, gives correct information in lawsuits, divorces, lost friends, etc.; valuable advice to ladies and gentlemen on love, courtships and marriages, and how to choose a wife or husband for future happiness; what business best adapted to, and where to go for success and speedy riches; tells if the one you love is true or false; stock speculations a specialty. The professor does not require to return to such a method as charms or such trash, and does not wish to be classed with card readers, etc., but a life reader from the laws of science, which is clairvoyancy and spiritual mediumship. Those who have been humbugged by false pretenders must not give up in despair, but consult the Professor at once. You will find him reasonable in prices, and all business strictly confidential. Office hours, 9 to 9. Sundays, 9 to 5.

This advertiser certainly does not suffer from modesty; his pretentious claims are probably found by experience to attract business to himself, an expedient as old as Cagliostro. His bold effrontery is equalled, however, by a man doing business in Chicago, whose claim to knighthood I have mentioned: —

Sir Russell Easton is unquestionably the most successful medium before the public. His power excites the wonder and the admiration of even the most sceptical. He gives advice on business, speculation, courtship, marriage, divorce, little lovers' quarrels, reunites the separated, and causes speedy and happy marriage with the one of your choice. As a charm worker he has no equal. The troubled and unfortunate should seek his aid and counsel. All persons unsuccessful in business who seem lucky should call on Sir Russell Easton and start aright. Young people contemplating marriage and those unhappily united should call at once and obtain knowledge that is invaluable. Sir Russell Easton is so sure of his powers he guarantees his work as unfailing. All patrons who visit his parlors take pleasure in recommending him as a medium of real worth and rare merit. His readings are always satisfactory or fee refunded. He excels in the following phases of mediumistic power: Reuniting the separated, imparting magnetic power through psychic force, looking up heirships and old estates, causing marriage with the one of your choice, adjusting lovers' quarrels, overcoming your enemies, removing bad influences, looking up safe and good paying investments on commission, giving sound and sensible advice in lawsuits. Sir Russell Easton is consulted by letter from all portions of the earth wherever the English language is spoken, and is the only medium capable of giving assistance at a distance as well as by personal interviews. He is permanently located in parlor formerly occupied by Professor J. Jefferson. All matters are strictly confidential and sacred. Letter containing stamp promptly answered. Sittings for ladies, $1; gents, $2. Office hours from 9.30 a. m. to 8 p. m. Sundays, 10.30 a. m. to 5 p. m. Address Sir Russell Easton.

The large German population of New York city is appealed to

through German newspapers, which contain advertisements of *Wahrsagerinen* similar to those of their English-speaking rivals : —

Die Zukunft enthüllt, und Rath in allen Sachen, Krankheiten, Geschäft, Heirath, Liebe, Prozeß, Handlungen von Freund und Feind, u. s. w. Mrs. J. Schaefer, berühmte Prophetin, [address follows.]

The French residents of New York are also favored with similar notices : —

CONSULTEZ L'ASTROLOGUE. Connaissez votre destinée, les années a venir favorables ou contraires, chances de fortune, mariage, santé, etc. Envoyer un dollar, date de naissance et sexe à E. Archer ——. Faveur gratuite; les dames a marier, qui en feront la demande, verront apparaître le portrait magique de leur futur époux sur une place blanche de leur horoscope, d'un dollar. Consultations verbales l'après midi et le soir. A titre d'essai et preuve de savoir occulte à toute personne envoyant 25 cents, en argent, date de naissance, etc., il sera dit quelques particularités frappantes de sa vie, passée ou présente.

The probable income of these impostors can only be conjectured, though some estimate may be formed of the value of the business in Washington city if the following advertiser tells the truth : —

Mme. Castella, Clairvoyant, who will shortly leave for San Francisco, desires to sell her entire business and furnished house to clairvoyant; guarantee $100 a month can be made.

The circulars distributed by hand in small towns do not differ essentially from the newspaper "ads.," but are generally longer, and their form admits of display and heavy types. During a recent sojourn in Lakewood, N. J., two circulars fell into my hands, which are striking specimens of this literature. In one of these "Mrs. Dr. Edwards" announces she will spend one week in Lakewood, place and dates given, and then proceeds as follows : —

Mrs. Dr. Edwards, the greatest and the most celebrated clairvoyant in the world, and is known in this country from Maine to Mexico. She was born with the wonderful gift of second sight, and with a veil. She is the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter. She reveals every mystery; tells you if the one you love is true or false. She removes every grief, settles lovers' troubles, and causes speedy love marriages. She gives reliable information to gentlemen in all business transactions, and informs them how to make profitable investments and acquire speedy riches. She tells lucky lottery numbers. She has an Osiris Egyptian Talisman, which is noted all the world over as a specific charm for the unlucky. All who are in trouble or sick should call without delay. Ladies, 50c. to $1.00. Gentlemen, $1.00. Office hours from 9 A. M. to 9 P. M.

The second circular is most craftily worded, and well calculated to attract believers in the supernatural.

THE GREAT EGYPTIAN PROPHETESS, SENTINELLA GUZHDO, whose astounding revelations and miraculous cures have been agitating Europe and puzzling the philosophic minds of the age, is a lineal descendant of Zindello, king of one of the most ancient tribes of Egypt. Her parents were born near Cairo, on

the Nile. Her father, *Mrascha Guzhdo*, was the seventh son, and her mother, *Feleschine Sikerwaul*, the seventh daughter. SENTINELLA, their offspring, from her infancy was looked upon as a prodigy. Being the seventh daughter and born with a caul on her face, she was looked upon and held in the highest veneration by all who saw her.

She possesses rare gifts as a fortune-teller, removes spells, and cures diseases by charms which have been carefully preserved in her tribe for generations back. She makes a nominal charge merely to defray travelling expenses, her only object being to benefit mankind. She tells the future as well as the past in the life of all, from birth upwards. All disclosures strictly confidential. Ask at —— House for SENTINELLA GUZHDO.

I can easily imagine that the innocent and unwary who trust themselves to this accomplished Egyptian Prophetess, after being fleeced by her, might be inclined to exclaim with Antony: —

> [Cleopatra], like a right gypsy, hath at fast and loose,
> Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.

Contrasting strangely with these pretentious circulars is the following advertisement, in which the candid disavowals are quite refreshing. It is from Washington, D. C.: —

I am not a countess nor a gypsy queen; am not a seventh daughter; was not born with a caul; am not something new and just arrived, but am Mme. Francis, one of the oldest-established mediums, and am here to stay. Am not indorsed by the clergy, but am indorsed by some of the most learned and influential people of our city and many others; am here to help all those that are in trouble. Life given from cradle to grave. Cards, 25; trances, 50. Hours, 9 to 9. Those that are in trouble call and be convinced.

In conclusion, the thought suggests itself, how can such charlatans flourish, and what class of persons contribute to their support? Their patrons, I conjecture, can be grouped under two heads: (1.) The superstitious who ignorantly believe that mankind has power over the supernatural. In this class fall numbers of "silly women, ever learning, never able to come to the truth." Probably a large proportion of this credulous class are of foreign birth. (2.) The curious non-believers in the pretensions of the fortune-tellers, who visit them "just for the fun of the thing." Some of this class would not openly admit a shadow of belief, yet will be more or less influenced by the mystical and rhapsodical talk of the medium; their curiosity is excited, their hope of securing benefits aroused, and the first visit is sure to be followed by others, feeling, as they say, that "there must be something in it."

The sale of magic charms probably adds materially to the uncertain income of these clever people, who live largely by their wits, for the number of persons who wear charms of one kind or another is surprisingly large. And yet not surprising, for the aristocratic merchant who carries in his pocket a horse-chestnut as a safeguard

against rheumatism, and the fond mother who hangs on her infant's neck an amber necklace to ward off the croup, are giving countenance in a genteel way to superstitions which in a grosser form they condemn, when practised by those of a lower social position.

The wealthy and learned who have become victims to the craft of the spiritualist may be alluded to, though this phase of superstition does not properly fall within the scope of this study.

Another limited class of patrons are men who visit the advertisers with a view of exposing fraud; but such are often discomforted by the ingenuity of the fortune-tellers, who through long experience are prepared for every emergency. Indeed, these disciples of Simon Magus become very shrewd students of human nature, and learn to judge very quickly the mental capacity of their clients, as well as the probable length of their purses.

The daily press occasionally throws light on the question who supports these knaves. A man having disappeared in Bangor, Maine, his friends, after two weeks' fruitless search, consulted clairvoyants, spiritualists, and a person having "second-sight," in hopes of assistance, all of which was duly telegraphed to the Boston newspapers (October, 1895). Not long ago certain detectives on the police force of New York city persuaded the owner of lost property to consult a clairvoyant, and to pay her a round sum for her services. The New York papers of May 18, 1895, contain a remarkable story. Two men from near Rochester, having been missing for several days, the father of one of them, the Rev. Mr. Blank, drove ten miles to the house of Mrs. H., a fortune-teller, to seek her advice. Mrs. H. told the clergyman that the two victims had been murdered by men with clubs. Ages ago King Saul consulted the Witch of Endor with marked success, and perhaps the New York clergyman found in that ancient chronicle justification for his folly.

Financially and socially, these people who live by preying on credulity born of ignorance have no standing in this world, and in the next they are consigned by Dante to one of the lowest divisions of the Inferno, "Malebolge;" the poet represents them as having their heads turned around on their shoulders: —

> See how he makes a bosom of his back;
> Because he wished to see too far before,
> He looks behind, and backward takes his way.

Henry Carrington Bolton.

LITIZ.

Eastern Pennsylvania possesses an old village, which the writer regards with attachment founded on the unreasoning affection of childhood. Then as now, one could not but feel that here abode "sincerity, faith, and content," together with unchanging and wonderful cleanliness and comfort, in each and every household. This is Litiz, to-day spelled Lititz, one of three Moravian settlements, whose earliest characteristic was the excellent boarding-schools founded more than a century ago, and which still retain popularity.

Long since, Bethlehem surpassed Nazareth and Litiz, and became a prosperous town, in spite of the head-shakings of the other villages, more in sorrow than anger. Had not Litiz said, when thirty years before it had been proposed to establish a new industry: "No, indeed! Look at Bethlehem, with its iron-works and other mills, just ruined!" Accordingly, Litiz closed its eyes, and folded its hands, again lulled to slumber by the babbling waters of "The Spring," as it flowed through the town. The long straight linden-lined street has hardly changed, saving that a beautiful memorial chapel has been built close to the girls' boarding-school. The sun shines on the same unbroken quiet, until at half past eleven the church bell calls the village to dinner, while the same exquisite cleanness is everywhere to be found.

When "Sister Polly Penry" returned from Lancaster, whither she had gone to "learn a new stitch in embroidery" (*vide* the archives), the appearance of the village street was not very different from that which twenty years ago met the eyes of her possible descendant, in spite of the century which had elapsed. At the present time, the shadow of the trolley is over the land, and when once within its grasp, Litiz will soon be as "composite" as any other village.

The main street lies, not exactly east and west, but a little inclined to that direction, curved northward at the western end, and there imperceptibly merging into the high road which leads to Lancaster, where once sat the American Congress.

The houses stood trimly in line on both sides of the one thoroughfare, planted with lindens and weeping willows, with gardens on either side, and ample pavements in front. In accordance with an early law soon rescinded, most of the older stone houses have two front doors, one provided with facing seats; all, by the same rule, had upper floors, generally with steeply sloping roofs. None present their gables to the street, as is the case in so many New England villages, and while Litiz showed none of the small bleak frame

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